

## The Reconstruction of Community and Identity among Guatemalan Returnees

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This article deals with the construction of livelihoods and identities in the context of forced migration. It is based on anthropological fieldwork in La Quetzal, a community near the river Usumacinta in the Petén region of Guatemala, inhabited by people who have returned to Guatemala from different refugee camps in southern Mexico after twelve to fifteen years in exile. They are now in the process of constructing a new community in the Lancandón jungle of the Petén.<sup>1</sup> The return to La Quetzal is the end of a long process of movement that started in the late 1960s and early 1970s when thousands of poor peasants from different parts of the Guatemalan highlands moved to the almost uninhabited tropical lowlands of Ixcán and the Petén regions in search for land. This move was part of a colonization programme led by the Catholic Church and supported by the Guatemalan government to reduce the pressure on land reform in the highlands (Morrissey 1978; Dennis et al. 1988).

A few years after the relocation to the tropical areas, the peasants were on the move again. Caught in the middle of gunfire between guerrilla forces and the army, the peasants initially tried to adapt to the situation of terror and violence while staying in their villages, and later, with the escalation of violence, by hiding in the jungle (Falla 1994). When this internal refugee situation became unbearable, they crossed the border to Mexico where they were received by the 'international refugee system', thus becoming a target group for international aid organizations (Gallagher 1989; Malkki 1995). With the initiation of the peace process in the early 1990s, a permanent solution for the refugee problem became a central topic in the negotiations between URNG (Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit)<sup>2</sup> and the Guatemalan government. The peace negotiations made possible their collective return to the Petén region in April 1995. Since then they have been in the process of constructing a new village in the jungle of the Petén, putting into practice new knowledge and skills, and mobilizing the social networks that they constructed during the years of exile, combining them with some of those they had practised before they had become refugees.

This article will focus on the experiences of migration of the returnees as social interface situations – social interface being defined as a 'critical point of intersection between different life worlds or domains where discontinuities exist based on discrepancies in values, interests, knowledge and power. More concretely, they characterize social situations in which the relationships between actors become oriented around the problem of devising ways of "bridging", accommodating, or contesting each others' different social and cognitive worlds' (Long 1989, 2000). The interface concept draws the attention to areas of discontinuity inherent in social life generally, but especially salient in situations of migration like the ones experienced by the returnees in La Quetzal. Studying such situations helps to understand how perceptions, interests and relationships of the various actors involved

are reshaped, leading to 'new' interface encounters the next time around.

The returnees to La Quetzal have been involved in a number of interface situations over the last thirty years. When they settled in the regions of Ixcán and the Petén in the 1960s and 1970s, access to land depended on membership in the agrarian cooperatives organized by European and American liberation theologians. These cooperatives represented practices, ideas and values quite different from those they had known in their former communities and plantations on the southern coast, where they used to migrate temporarily to make ends meet. The foreign priests not only introduced them to new crops and production techniques but also to a new religious ethic, and through the cooperatives to a new economic ethic, that of equality, justice and development, which inspired at least some of them to start acting and thinking in new ways.<sup>3</sup> When the armed conflict intensified during the mid 1970s, the priests were either deported from the country or killed, and the military and guerrilla forces dominated the settler areas.

Those settlers who had enough land and great hopes for the future did not support the guerrillas. As in other parts of Guatemala, they were drawn into the conflict against their will (Stoll 1993; Le Bot 1995; Tavico 2001). Living in Ixcán, the region where the EGP-guerrilla forces established a major base, they were defined as subversives by the armed forces and became targets of the scorched earth campaign in the early 1980s (Payeras 1982; Falla 1994; Schirmer 1998). Those who fled to Mexico and were registered in refugee camps entered an area of social life dominated by a global aid culture, represented by the UN and a number of Mexican and international aid and solidarity organizations. Common for these interface situations is that they were characterized by an inequality of power. The terms of interaction were to a large extent defined by others than the peasants themselves, although the level of influence varied considerably. This does not mean that the returnees have behaved as passive victims of circumstance. On the contrary, they have shown an extraordinary ability to engage in new situations and opportunities by trying to turn them to their advantage.

This draws attention to the need to situate the idea of interface within a conceptual framework of an actor-oriented approach. This approach assumes that variations in organizational forms and cultural patterns are to a large extent the outcome of the different ways in which social actors organizationally and cognitively deal with problematic situations and accommodate themselves to the interests and designs of others' lives. Inherent in this concept of social actor is the notion of the human being as an active subject with the capacity to process social experience and to invent new ways of coping with life even under extreme coercion. This holds good whether or not the actor is deemed 'powerful' or 'powerless'. Within the limits of their socio-cultural context, men and women attempt to solve problems, learn how to intervene in social events around them and monitor their own actions while observing how others react to their behaviour (Long 1989, 222-3). The history of the returnees, filled with ruptures and changing social environments, illustrates how poor and extremely exploited people are able again and again to mobilize themselves and engage in new social experiments wherever they see possibilities to improve their circumstances. In the following I will discuss how interface encounters in exile prepared the ground for the establishment of a community that is quite different from the ones the returnees had left behind in Guatemala.

## The experience of exile

According to my informants, their effort in constructing a new village is related to their experience of exile. The interaction with the international aid community offered space for participation and influence that granted the refugees access to material resources, new skills and knowledge that inspired them to act and reflect on themselves and their place in the world in new ways.

The following statement from one of my female informants synthesizes the way returnees talk about the experience of exile:

Looking back, the experience of exile, in spite of a lot of suffering, has been very rewarding. I have learned a lot, I have learned to read and write, I have learned Spanish – before I could only speak with people from my own group – I have learned that I have rights, that there are human rights, but maybe the most important of all, we have learned to organize in order to claim our rights to create a better life.

Many people refer to the move from Guatemala to Mexico as a kind of passage from ignorance to enlightenment. Some used the term ‘animalito’ (small animal) to exemplify their previous level of ignorance. One of the present community leaders gave me the following example to illustrate the darkness of his mind (his term) before going to exile:

When I lived in the highlands I thought that there were no other countries in the world than Guatemala. I did not know about the existence of Mexico before I arrived in Ixcán [border area] in 1988. In Quintana [Mexico] I discovered that there are hundreds maybe thousands of countries in the world. There I also learned why there are different countries, and why borders exist. Now it is difficult to understand that I could have been so ignorant.<sup>4</sup>

The encounter with the international aid community initiated a process in which the refugees started to reflect on themselves and their past experiences in new ways (Aguayo et al. 1985). The fact that most people were illiterate and could not speak Spanish was no longer seen as an expression of racial inferiority but as a product of poverty and injustice. People who had never set a foot in a school building learned to speak and read Spanish. Women who had never spoken in public before tell how they were encouraged to speak up and how they managed to overcome their timidity. The respect they received and the possibility to learn new skills and participate in a variety of activities that they could only dream of when living in the Guatemalan jungle made them feel that they were growing as human beings.

The majority of the returnees in La Quetzal, whether fleeing from Ixcán or the Petén, had left the country in 1982-83 and had spent most of the years until their return in 1995 in different refugee camps in southern Mexico, first in Chiapas, and from 1984 in Campeche and Quintana Roo. By then the refugee problem in Mexico had attracted international attention, and a considerable number of agencies began allocating funds. Most of them channelled their support through Mexican governmental or non-governmental organizations. In Chiapas this practice dominated, due to the presence of well-prepared local organizations such as the Diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas with a long history of work in the region, especially with indigenous people. Moreover, they had had previous experience with international collaboration, something that facilitated rapid fund raising.

Several authors have criticized the Mexican government's policy towards the refugees, of whom Delli Sante (1996) is perhaps the most severe (Aguayo et al. 1987; Kauffer 1997). For my informants, however, the passage from Guatemala to Mexico was like 'going from hell to heaven'. In the first place they referred to the security situation. Before crossing the border they had lived in constant fear knowing that if the military found them they would be killed in the cruellest way without any mercy, because they had seen this happen to others. In the beginning they also feared the Mexican military. That is one reason why many people were reluctant to cross the border.<sup>5</sup> To their surprise, they discovered that interaction with soldiers meant protection rather than persecution and harassment, something that was a new experience for them. In the act of registration as a refugee and incorporation into the international refugee system, they were no longer defined as dangerous subversives or objects of extermination, but as uprooted and displaced victims of violence, deserving assistance. Those who for different reasons chose to remain unregistered and live scattered outside the camps did not receive the same protection and attention (Zinser 1989; Salvadó 1988).

Another aspect that was often mentioned by the returnees was the attitudes of the aid workers towards indigenous people. In Guatemala they were used to discrimination and exploitation in interaction with non-Indians. In the refugee context, being an Indian was no longer defined as having less worth. On the contrary, in the imagery of the Ladino/Indian<sup>6</sup> relationship held by many aid and solidarity workers assisting in the refugee camps, the Ladinos were the rich, bad guys and the Indians the poor, good ones who deserved the best treatment. In Chiapas the refugees were not treated as passive recipients of aid. From the very beginning they were stimulated to participate in the making of their new livelihood, not only as food production and the building of shelters and infrastructure were concerned, but also by creating new forms of cooperation for mutual benefit. Literacy classes and courses in Spanish were organized in the camps and the interest was enormous. In Guatemala most of the adults could only speak their indigenous mother tongue, preventing them from smooth communication with people who belonged to different ethnic groups.

The strategy of some of the organizations, especially the Diocese of San Cristóbal, was to recruit personnel among the refugees to be trained who would then be able to take over important parts of the relief work. Generally, the Guatemalan refugees became very well organized in spite of their precarious and poor conditions. Their success inspired funding agencies, especially the UN and international NGOs, to extend their support beyond emergency needs, thereby contributing to a more integral and coherent process of social and economic development (Kauffer 1997).

With international recognition and assistance, the material situation of the refugees improved gradually, but their security situation deteriorated. Staying in Chiapas close to the Guatemalan border, they were targets of attacks from the Guatemalan army. Between 1981 and 1984 the Guatemalan armed forces regularly entered Mexican territory in search for guerrilla soldiers in the refugee camps (Aguayo 1985; Kauffer 1997).<sup>7</sup> The Guatemalan as well as the American governments claimed that the camps operated as reserve areas for the guerrilla movement. The military interventions represented a threat to Mexican national security and revealed clearly the dilemma faced by the Mexican authorities that wanted to prevent a rupture with Guatemala in spite of the incursions, yet at the same time their ac-

ceptance of Guatemalan refugees meant an implicit denouncement of the Guatemalan regime. The Mexican government also faced internal problems produced by social unrest in the border areas due to increased pressure on the land, and by fervent political debates both at the local and national level raised by political groups as well as civil organizations mobilizing to pressure the government to protect the refugees.

In 1984 the Mexican government decided to move the refugees away from the border areas and spread them throughout the neighbouring states of Campeche and Quintana Roo. In spite of the tension and aggression created by the Guatemalan military presence in the border area, most of my informants strongly opposed this decision and fought against it. In the first place they were afraid of what was going to happen to them. When they learned about the relocation plans, rumours about their destinies started to circulate – and they were terrified. Some thought they would be relocated and killed by the Mexican army; others heard about an equally frightening scenario of being deported to Guatemala and handed over to the Guatemalan army. According to some informants, the guerrillas fomented these rumours because they did not want to lose contact with the refugees, even though they officially supported the relocation (Delli Sante 1996).

After having overcome the initial hardships in the new camps, most of the refugees realized that the transfer was for the better. Housing standards were improved, and people had access to land, potable water, electricity, good roads and transport. Above all, they now also had more possibilities to obtain cash incomes, for example, by selling agricultural products to ambulant merchants or working as construction workers or maids in the big cities. Social services improved considerably, especially education and health.

From 1988 the State Ministry of Health in Quintana was responsible for primary health care in the four camps located in this state and from 1989-90 the settlements' schools were incorporated into the national education system. Mexican teachers were hired as school directors to supervise Guatemalan education promoters. From the arrival in Quintana, UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) and COMAR (Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados) recruited literate refugees to be trained as educators. Moreover, UNHCR in collaboration with the Mexican government implemented programmes to help the refugees to integrate and become self-sufficient. These programmes were based on a combination of subsistence farming, casual wage labour within the region and income-generating projects within the settlements themselves (Stepputat 1989). They emphasized the preservation of the refugees' ethnic and cultural values, the participation of women, the physical and intellectual development of children and the protection of the environment.

In a study carried out in the camps in Campeche and Quintana in 1985-86, COMAR was criticized for being too authoritarian and not sufficiently involving the refugees in the different development efforts (Aguayo et al. 1987). This is not reflected in the way the returnees speak about this period. According to them organizations and networks of refugees within the camps as well as between camps mobilized and utilized local resources and energies for problem solving. This was accomplished thanks to the massive support of international agencies providing human as well as financial assistance.

## Preparing for the return

The returnees to La Quetzal were part of a collective refugee return that started in 1993 and ended in 1998.<sup>8</sup> The collective planning began formally in 1987 when the refugees in UNHCR camps organized to choose Permanent Commissions (Spanish acronym CCPP) to represent them in what became a five year negotiating ordeal with the Guatemalan government, mediated by the Roman Catholic Church and the UNHCR. The resulting Return Accords of 8 October 1992 initiated a process that was largely controlled by the Permanent Commissions. The accords detailed agreements on topics such as timing of return, land access, credit, military service, legal rights of returnees and the role of NGOs (Mahony 1998).

Even though most of my informants had considered their stay in Mexico a temporary one, they had had no concrete plans of return until after the signing of the first peace accord in 1992. The government's commitment to facilitate access to land for those refugees who decided to return was an important achievement and a motivating factor for repatriation. International verification and monitoring, particularly by the United Nations, was also an important element in this process.<sup>9</sup>

In 1993 the refugees organized themselves to negotiate the details of the return and to plan how the returnee communities should be structured and developed. This process was controlled by the CCPP whose leaders were closely linked to the URNG (Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit). The refugees who intended to return to the Petén region were expected to approach the Vertiente Norte of the CCPP, the branch responsible for the planning of repatriations to the regions of the Petén, Alta and Baja Verapaz.<sup>10</sup> The Vertiente Norte started out with 27 members who became the leading force in the planning and implementation of the collective return of 236 families to La Quetzal, which was the first for the Petén (Cedillo 1999).

The Vertiente Norte developed a community-centred model of development that integrated social, political and economic dimensions. Rejecting what they defined as the dominant liberal model of development as one that concentrates wealth in the few and impoverishes the majority, they intended to establish cooperative-based agricultural communities. Their model of communitarian development was built on the following principles: the recognition of human rights, inclusive and participatory democracy and an efficient and sustainable communitarian economic base that protects natural resources (CCPP 1989). It should be noted that, in spite of the emphasis on participation, this model was primarily a product from above. Only the most politicized of my male informants – a relatively small number – participated in the planning process from the beginning. Most of them had already been actively involved as community leaders, such as education and health promoters and group representatives in the camps. A few, all men, were members of the delegations sent by CCPP to the Petén region to identify possible sites of return and to negotiate the terms of purchase and the establishment of the cooperative once the farmlands had been selected. The rest were recruited later at a point when most of the general terms of the return had been established.

Committed to the idea that development should benefit all members of the community, the CCPP encouraged various constituencies such as the women, the youth, and educational and health promoters to organize themselves into sectors (*sectores*) to participate in the planning process. By the end of 1993, the organization of refugee women – named Ixmucané – had been established. A corresponding youth organization – Maya Tikal – was established in early 1994. Even though the

education and health promoters did not establish formal organizations until after the return, they had been heavily engaged in enhancing their skills in order to serve in their new community. The training of health and education promoters had been started to provide health and education services in the refugee camps, long before any concrete plans of the return existed, but from now on these efforts were intensified and directed particularly toward the preparation of the situation in the returnee community.

The mobilization of women started after the publication of a UNCHR study in 1992 demonstrating that the situation of the women was quite disheartening. A number of working groups focusing specifically on women's problems with topics such as health, education and human rights were organized with the support of international organizations and with the final objective of creating a women's organization. The documents from the founding assembly of Ixmucané depict great enthusiasm among the women.

Finally we women will leave our kitchens, postpone our housework to participate in organizational activities. In the return process we want to stand side by side with our men. So far we have achieved a few, but important victories. Our men have understood that we will be important in the building of the new community as health workers, human rights workers and midwives.

Women who were active in Ixmucané give a more nuanced picture. They tell that these awareness-raising courses were not well received by men who so far had only reluctantly accepted that their wives and daughters could participate in activities that would contribute to the family economy. They were sceptical towards what these new activities would bring. However, the CCPP leaders supported the establishment of the women's organization not only because they represented a specific perspective that was important in the construction of a new community, but also because of the active interest from aid organizations to support the empowerment of women through women's projects. Ixmucané played an important role in the preparation for the return and during the first difficult period in the Petén, when the efforts of everybody were needed. When the emergency phase was over and the community was more established, women's participation became more difficult (Stølen 2000).

The return to La Quetzal was carried out after almost two years of preparation. The process started in June 1993 when the CCPP commission visited the Petén to identify land for sale and to recommend productive alternatives and mechanisms to obtain the land. It also identified the need to carry out forest inventories and management plans to secure sustainable use of the forest resources. The commission returned to Mexico with several alternatives, with La Quetzal as the most promising. Once the choice for La Quetzal was taken, two major challenges were lay ahead. First, a group of people willing to engage in this project of return had to be recruited and consolidated. Second, all the practicalities associated with the purchase of land had to be effectuated. In the beginning only a few families had shown an interest in returning to the region of the Petén. A recruitment campaign was therefore initiated by a small group of refugees interested in buying the farmlands around La Quetzal. They travelled to different camps in Quintana Roo and Campeche where they had contacts, trying to recruit people to join their project of return.

Many of those who finally settled in La Quetzal were recruited through this 'campaign'. They had not planned to return to the Petén region at first. They would

have preferred the region of Ixcán, but gradually came to realize that this was not possible or desirable. Other settlers now controlled the land previously owned by the refugees, and they were not willing to give it up without a fight (Manz 1988; Garst 1993; Egan 1995). Nor were the refugees eager to face conflicts upon their return, which certainly would have been the outcome if they started to reclaim the rights to the lands they had once tilled. Moreover, due to the addition of many new family members, they would need more land than they had had before to sustain their adult sons and daughters, who had married and become parents in exile. Those who had been living in the Petén before the 'violence' preferred to return to this region. They did not want to return to their old communities because they felt excluded and threatened by their ex-neighbours who had defined them as guerrilla supporters and traitors.

The return to the land around La Quetzal was one of the most controversial of the collective repatriations due the fact that 80 per cent of it was located within the core area of the Maya Biosphere Reserve.<sup>11</sup> The *finca* had been founded and partly settled in the 1970s by a cooperative of indigenous peasants from the western highlands. These settlers fled the area in the early 1980s when the FAR guerrilla forces established a camp in the jungle part of the finca, which attracted counterinsurgency actions. Once the returnees had decided to buy this land, the CCPP negotiated the purchase with the owners. The next step in the process was to secure the credits needed to make the purchase and to obtain government approval to settle on the land. They soon ran into trouble with CONAP (Consejo Nacional de Áreas Protegidas), the government agency responsible for the protected areas in Guatemala. According to the law that created the reserve, settling within the core area is strictly prohibited and CONAP refused to approve any settlement in the area. The refugees argued that because the finca had existed prior to the establishment of the reserve in 1990, and because private ownership of land was protected in the constitution, they had the right to settle and develop the land. They also provided the government and CONAP with a forest management plan that they maintained would protect the ecosystem of the area. This initiated a long and difficult process of negotiation between the refugees and various government agencies, the most important being CONAP, CEAR (Comisión Especial de Atención de Refugiados) and INTA (Instituto Nacional de Transformación Agraria). While the last two were eventually willing to approve settlement, CONAP remained intransigent, which prevented the release of funds and credits needed to buy the land. As a result the return was postponed several times. In December 1994, tired of struggling against bureaucratic authorities, the refugees took the matters into their own hands and organized a self-financed working brigade to go to the finca to start preparing the ground. In January 1995, this work brigade escorted by international companions arrived in the area to build temporary sheds and prepare for the return. In April 1995, approximately 1,200 refugees returned to La Quetzal, this time escorted by sixty international companions, young people mostly from Europe and the US, recruited by the CCPP.<sup>12</sup> Although the CCPP was the main organizer, the process of return was also supported by UNHCR and CEAR and some other national and international NGOs.

As with other collective repatriations that took place between the signing of the 8 October Agreement of 1992 and the signing of the final peace agreement in 1996, this return, which was taking place in the middle of the armed conflict, had strong political connotations. The political character of the return to La Quetzal

became evident during the three days when the refugees landed at the airport of Flores, and their arrival at the finca. Receptions and demonstrations were organized by a number of NGOs. Popular organizations and trade unions were present at the airport, there was a demonstration and a Mayan religious ceremony in the ruins of Tikal, and a Catholic sermon was held in the municipal capital of La Libertad. These activities were financed by the Permanent Commissions, NGOs and the Catholic Church of the Petén (the UNHCR limited its responsibility to transporting the returnees from the airport to the site of settlement). Having overcome countless difficulties, the arrival of the returnees in La Quetzal was certainly a great political victory for the leaders and their legal and political advisors (van der Vaeren 2000, 2-4).<sup>13</sup> What motivated the majority of the returnees, however, was something else entirely.

### **Motives for return**

For most people the land question was the number one motive for their return to Guatemala. They wanted ownership to land – land that could be passed on to their children. The most politicized among them also emphasized their desire to partake in the building of peace and democracy in Guatemala. They felt that the experiences learned while in exile put them in a privileged position to have a leading role in this process.

The decision to return was not an easy one for many people. The insecurity about what was waiting for them in their home country combined with the fact that they had achieved what they considered a good life in Mexico did not motivate their decision to return. There was a clear age and gender difference as far as the attitude towards returning was concerned. Generally, the adult men who had been more involved in the political processes and the negotiation of the return to Guatemala were the most positive, and the women and adolescent children were the most reluctant. The women were generally more reluctant because of fear for their security. Even though the women had established their own organization with the objective of being more active participants in the process of return and the construction of a new community, relatively few of them had been involved in the planning process, which was largely controlled by a number of politicized and active men. Moreover, many women felt that, even though life could have been better in Mexico, they had achieved a situation where both the material and the social needs of the family were being taken care of. When talking about what they appreciated most in Mexico, the women emphasized the feeling of security as most important. They also emphasized the quality of housing and basic infrastructure, especially piped water. Another topic often mentioned was the variety in produce; they had had all kinds of fruits and vegetables in addition to the obligatory maize and beans. Not only could they cultivate and consume it, they could also easily sell it at good prices. Moreover, they spoke of the many job opportunities for young people. Their unmarried sons and daughters could work in nearby cities such as Ciudad del Carmen and Cancún and in this way had contributed to the family income. *'Life was much easier in Mexico, but my husband wanted to return. What could I do, I could not stay behind, could I?'* (María, age 45).

Life was extremely hard during the first year in La Quetzal. Even though the returnees received support from national and international institutions, the major burden rested on the returnees themselves. They returned to a camp in the jungle where they had to start completely anew. However, these people did not come un-

prepared. For more than two years they had been preparing for their return, and in that time the cooperative had been organized and was legally recognized in Guatemala. They had organized other segments of the inhabitants, they had acquired land, even though legal formalities had not been settled, and they had worked out a number of plans as a basis for the construction of the new community. Not only had they made outlines regarding the production and use of natural resources, but also regarding urbanization, comprising a variety of infrastructural and service projects all well adapted to the ecological conditions of the rainforest.

A great amount of time and resources had been given by the many NGO technicians and advisors in assisting the refugees in the preparation process. The plans had looked very good on paper and were well intentioned, but they turned out to be too idealistic and theoretical as far as the actual implementation was concerned. It may be said that the collective return was a political success, but this was not the case as far as the practical arrangements were concerned.

A few days after the arrival in La Quetzal, most of the people and organizations that had assisted with the preparation for return and installation in the new community disappeared, only visiting the returnee community sporadically. The support for the collective returnees was strongly politically motivated as far as the advisors associated with URNG were concerned. They had achieved their objectives once the demonstrations and ceremonies had been completed and the returnees had arrived in their new settlement. They were not especially concerned with the practical questions that related to the survival and the construction of a new community. Only representatives from two NGOs and two *acompañantes* (accompaniers) remained in the community after the first week (van der Vaeren 2000, 13-14). Nevertheless, thanks to their organizing abilities and external support, the returnees were able to make a living in spite of overwhelming difficulties. Only one week after arriving, they were able to send their children to a school organized by the education promoters in the sheds that had been built to house the working brigades. A provisory health clinic was also soon established, and during the first year they were assisted in running the clinic by personnel from a Guatemalan NGO.

### **Building a new community**

What distinguishes La Quetzal (and returnee communities in general) from most peasant communities in Guatemala is that it is multiethnic. Internally people identify themselves and are identified by others in reference to the language spoken – and in this community eight Mayan languages are represented.<sup>14</sup> Those who do not speak an indigenous language are referred to as *castellanos*, unless their parents are known to speak an indigenous language. One may hear comments such as: ‘She is a ch’orti’, but does not speak the language’. The dichotomy ‘Ladino/Indian’ that is common in other parts of the country is not used here, because it is considered as applying to labels belonging to their discriminatory past. Some of my informants associate this new way of classification with the human rights courses given by the nuns from San Cristobál de las Casas. The ethnic differentiation based on language is only observed internally and limited to certain contexts. People from outside La Quetzal are referred to – and refer to themselves – as *retornados* (returnees).

The community is divided into four neighbourhoods named after the camps where the returnees used to live in Mexico, which means that most people living in the different neighbourhoods are old camp neighbours. The neighbourhoods are

also characterized by ethnic differences reflecting previous settlement patterns in the camps that were largely based on kinship and ethnicity. The neighbourhoods are constructed on the basis of kinship much in the same way as other peasant communities in Guatemala, and most households are nuclear family based. Couples try to establish their own household when they marry, unless they are going to take over their parents' house and land. Residence pattern is male-centred, which means that groups of households often consist of brothers and their families, even though the return from Mexico also produced certain ruptures with this practice. Several married women told that they did not want to join their husband's family when they returned to another part of the country, and that they managed to convince their husbands to come to La Quetzal. In most cases the husbands accepted because of the abundance of land in this community as compared to other areas. That is why we also may find groups of households of brothers and sisters in the same neighbourhood. The same is the case of those who have both their parents and in-laws in the same neighbourhood. Intense social interaction goes on between closely kin-related households, goods and services change hands and family members frequently visit each other, often several times a day.

La Quetzal is a peasant village where livelihood is based first and foremost on what can be extracted from the land. However, it is different from what is often associated with traditional peasant communities in Guatemala because of its strong cooperative organizational form and its location within the core area of the Mayan Biosphere Reserve (MBR), which is a protected area. The cooperative Unión Maya Itzá of La Quetzal owns 5,924 hectares of land, 80 per cent of which is located within the boundaries of the core area. This puts heavy constraints on the potential of production. Even though the land is owned by the cooperative, its use is closely regulated by CONAP.

The Unión Maya Itzá was established in June 1994, almost one year before the return to Guatemala, to facilitate the purchase of land and other preparations for the return. The cooperative is governed by the general assembly which delegates the responsibility of daily operations to a directive board – *junta directiva* – elected once a year.<sup>15</sup> The directive board consists of five ordinary members, plus one representative of each of the committees of education and of vigilance, the latter being responsible for the overall supervision of activities within the cooperative. The level of activity within the cooperative is very high, although the meetings of the board are no longer organized as frequently as they were during the first months after the return, when the members met every day to solve current problems. However, more people are attending meetings as the number of cooperative committees increase. In addition to the committees of education and vigilance, there are now thirteen other committees appointed by the cooperative which are responsible for the following activities: labour, agriculture, forestry, poultry, vegetables, apiculture, sewing, *xate*-gathering,<sup>16</sup> credit, transport, marketing, eco-tourism and elaboration of projects, all of them with their own president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer and one ordinary member. The committee of labour is a crucial committee responsible for the planning and recruitment of hands to carry out collective work for the cooperative.

In addition to the committees working within the cooperative, there are six other committees working at the community level. They are referred to as *sectores*, and are comprised of women, young people, education promoters, health promoters and midwives, catechists and parents of school children. Some of the sectors

are affiliated with formal organizations operating at the municipal, regional and national level. This is the case with the women, young people and the promoters. The sectors are also formally organized with a president, vice-president and other members.

People attend meetings, men more frequently than women, several times a week, and sometimes more than once a day. The cooperative with its board and fifteen committees mobilizes many people, and so do the different sectors. The community is also visited by many people who require attention from members of the board and the different committees or sectors, such as representatives of NGOs and other donor or potential donor organizations, journalists and visitors from other communities who come to 'learn about the experience of the returnees'. If one walks through the centre, especially in the afternoon, it is common to see people meeting in five or six different places. Attending a meeting takes up time, first because few people turn up on time so that one never knows when the meeting will start, and second because discussions tend to be long until everybody has had the opportunity to express his/her own opinions and then reach a consensus without voting.

Twice a week, on Wednesday afternoons and Sunday mornings, the catechists (thirteen altogether, all men) celebrate The Word at church. Women of all ages, children and old men also attend. When the parish priest arrives once every two months to celebrate mass, 'everybody' goes to church, except the members of the seven families who are evangelicals. The catechists are no longer the leading figures they used to be in the 1970s. In La Quetzal the cooperative leaders and the teachers are those who set the tone.

Due to the organized and detailed planning referred to earlier, the settlement of the returnees in La Quetzal has been very different from the more spontaneous ones so common in the Petén during the last decades, where a passive local development committee responding to the municipal mayor is often the only local organization.<sup>17</sup> In La Quetzal little was left to chance. The cooperative leadership, advised and supported by development agencies, entered the scene with a plan of communitarian development. A first step in the implementation of this plan was to make an inventory of all available resources. The land was carefully measured to determine borders, rivers, mountains, swampland and the village centre. Types of soil were classified and samples sent to a laboratory for analysis. A forest inventory was also made to identify the economic potentials of the jungle. The results were presented to the cooperative members in several workshops as part of an overall discussion about how the land should be used.

Many people who were not in leading positions arrived with an idea that the land should be divided so that each family could have its own individual land. This was how cooperatives normally used to be organized in Guatemala. The CCPP activists, who were convinced that individual solutions alone would not lead to development, could not accept their proposal. Moreover, in the case of La Quetzal it was not possible due to the fact that most of the land is located within the core area of the Mayan Biosphere and the object of restricted management. It was decided, however, that each family should be given the opportunity to produce its own food. Five hectares per family were assigned for this purpose, two plots of two hectares for each *milpa* (maize field) and one hectare of swampland for rice production. Only some 20 per cent of the land is to be used for subsistence purposes, and the rest is assigned for forest management.

Sustainable livelihood in La Quetzal depends on the exploitation of the forest, and not on the production of basic grains that barely keeps people alive. A plan of forest management, still to be fully implemented, has been elaborated with the support of Centro Maya,<sup>18</sup> a national NGO, and approved by CONAP. According to this plan, several tree species will be extracted for sale, thus providing cash income to the community. The jungle area assigned to forest management has been divided into 25 plots. One plot will be exploited each year for 25 years, after which the process will start over again. The trees on the first plot should then be big enough to be logged.

This means that the people in La Quetzal are still primarily subsistence producers. Maize is by far the most important crop and the most important staple food. Maize bread (tortilla) is the main staple in the local diet; a meal without tortillas is not a real meal. The importance of maize was revealed in people's narratives about the period during the 'violence' when they hid in the jungle. They told how they 'suffered from being without food'. When asked how they survived, they told that they had to eat manioc or other roots and wild fruits growing in the jungle. They did eat but what they ate was not considered 'food'. Consequently, when there is no maize to make tortillas, there is no food!

Maize is mainly produced for household consumption with some surplus sold to ambulant merchants arriving in the community. The same is generally the case of chilli and pumpkin seeds, which are the most widespread cash crops. These are crops that are grown in other parts of the region, but they are new to the peasants in this particular location, who are still in search for other suitable crops that can secure certain levels of cash income. The returnees produce enough maize to eat and some to sell, but cash incomes are too low to cover what is needed to lead a decent life, according to their own standards. These standards are set with reference to their living conditions in the refugee camps in Mexico. After more than five years in Guatemala, they are still far from reaching that level, which is an element of frustration for many people, especially the women, who feel responsible for the clothing and the education of the children.

It took more than four years for CONAP to approve the forest management plan. When the plan is fully implemented, people expect to obtain additional cash incomes. Continued support to the communitarian development model will depend on that. The income earned from the forest so far, mostly through sales of timber from the areas assigned to peasant agriculture, has been used for productive investments for the cooperative such as a grocery shop, two buses and a truck, and has not been distributed to individual members.

The returnees have abandoned the slash and burn agriculture that peasants had practised for centuries in Central America. They realized that the ecological conditions in this tropical rain forest and the limited land at their disposal make this production technique unsustainable. Moreover, on several occasions burning the milpas went out of control and caused severe damage to the forest. Now only newly cleared forestland is burned; existing milpas are slashed, but not burned. With the assistance of NGOs people are have started to experiment with crop rotation and green manure to prevent soil deterioration.

The cooperative members divide their time between the tasks to be carried out on the farm and their collective obligations, such as construction work, digging ditches to prevent the spread of forest fires, and logging, all of which amounts to some 80 man days per member. Even though people consider the work carried out

in the maize field as the most important, they claim that this work becomes subsidiary to the collective one because it is difficult to be absent when called upon by the cooperative unless one is able to send in a substitute. The three female members (two single and one married to a man who migrated to the US before the return) depend on males to help them, because women's work does not count in the cooperative. There is an ongoing discussion about the relationship between the individual and the collective work, because many people are uncertain about whether they will benefit from the latter. A major concern is the desired increase in family incomes and welfare. On two occasions cooperative members in a general assembly meeting questioned the investment policy of the cooperative calling it 'hyper-capitalist', and denounced what they called the disregard of the welfare needs of the people.

Within the peasant household no mayor changes have taken place. Labour is strictly gender specific. Women, with the help of their daughters, are responsible for housework, children and domestic animals, and men are responsible for the agricultural and collective work. As is well known from other rural societies, women are the first to get up in the morning, usually before dawn, to prepare food for their families. They light the fire, clean the *ixtamal* (the maize to be used for tortillas), hurry to the mill to grind the maize and return to the house to make tortillas. This process is repeated every day at morning, midday and late afternoon.

The rigidity of the existing sexual division of labour where women have the exclusive responsibility for housework and childcare, which in this context is not only very time consuming but also requires almost permanent presence in the home, greatly limits married women's opportunities for community participation. Since very few men are willing to assist their wives in the home, and those who actually do feel ashamed because they are objects of gossip and mockery, women's public participation often requires tough negotiations, detailed planning and helpful female relatives. Sometimes women do not succeed, and the result is an accusation of lack of commitment and reliability by those who try to assist them. Several of the income-generating projects (apiculture, chicken, horticulture) that were initiated and implemented by the women's organization suffered from this, and had disappointing results. When taken over by the men, who are freer to organize their use of time, the results changed. Thus, even though gender equality and the participation of women in the community are advocated by community leaders as central elements in the model of communitarian development, manifestations are barely noticeable beyond the level of rhetoric. Married women are weakly represented in public institutions, in the cooperative as well as in the church and in most sectors, and their organization Ixmucané is losing influence. Added to this is the lack of recognition of communal labour performed by women for the cooperative.

Increasing their cash income is a permanent preoccupation of the returnees, and they have adopted different strategies to obtain more money. One of the most popular strategies is to establish a small shop to sell produce at home. This does not generate a large income, but it does have the advantage in that it can easily be combined with housework and childcare. There are now ten of these small shops spread throughout the community. The supply of produce is generally not as good as in the cooperative shop, but prices are the same. The neighbourhood shop has the advantage of being close by and functions at the same time as a meeting place where neighbours can stop to exchange the latest news.

A number of people, many of them women and children, collect the wild plant

xate for sale. This can also be combined with household and agricultural tasks since xate grows in the jungle close to the community. The cooperative organizes the marketing through its xate committee. On Friday afternoons the collectors deliver their produce to the cooperative, whose representatives in turn dispatch it to a merchant arriving every Saturday morning to pick it up. Xate is exported primarily to the United States. Handicraft production is not common, but a few people make hammocks, a skill learned in the refugee camps in Mexico, and *morrales* (knitted bags). Others sell domestic animals, fruits or other farm products locally, and some work as day workers for other peasants, especially for the teachers who often do not find the time to do the work themselves.

During the first three years, labour migration was not common among the returnees. Everybody was needed in the construction of the new community, and people were prepared to make sacrifices to succeed. However, once the cooperative Unión Maya Itzá was consolidated, membership became limited. New membership depends on the retirement of old members, which, among other things, implies that only one son can replace his father as a cooperative member and acquire full access to the resources. The idea has been to create alternative employment possibilities for young people through education and through local processing of timber from the forest. The approval and implementation of forest management has been slow, and no attractive employment for young people has been created locally. For this reason, it is increasingly common for young men to work in construction in Mexico for shorter or longer periods. In 2000 several young women also went to Mexico find work, and the first illegal immigrants managed to enter the United States safely. This has inspired others to follow. During my last field-work period in November 2000, two groups of young men had recently departed towards the north guided by expensive 'coyotes', which is the local label for those who guide illegal immigrants. Unfortunately I have had no further information about this situation since my departure in 2000.

### **Organization and empowerment**

Returnees hold an ambivalent view of their past experiences. Most people would agree that the violence that obliged them to leave the country was the worst experience they had ever had. The majority lost close relatives who were either killed or died of the hardships endured while hiding in the jungle; they themselves have suffered from hunger and cold and from physical and psychological stress. At the same time they recognize that they have also learned much that they now cannot do without. Language and literacy are often the first things to be mentioned when discussing this topic. Most people have learned to speak Spanish, the official language in the region, which is something few were able to do when living in Guatemala before. The majority of the adults used to be illiterate, and now many have also learned to read and write.

Knowledge of their rights and the capacity to organize is often mentioned as one of the most important achievements. They speak up when politicians and government people visit the community by expressing their discontent and telling what should be done, and they have organized a number of actions, for example, by occupying public offices to bring attention to their rights. Perhaps more significant than these ad hoc mobilizations, which have been emphasized as being important and effective, are the more long term processes of organization and accomplish-

ment. What has been achieved in education may serve as a good illustration.

From the moment the refugees arrived in Mexico at the refugee camps, education was given a high priority and the children were sent to school, making the younger generation completely literate. At first the children had Mexican teachers, but soon Guatemalan education promoters were trained through UNCHR and other international agencies, with the objective of having Guatemalan teachers in the camps, and to prepare them for the return. Thanks to the efforts of these education promoters (eighteen altogether) the primary school was functioning within few days after the return to La Quetzal in the precarious buildings built by the working brigade, who had arrived before the rest.

Since then the education services have improved both quantitatively and qualitatively. Today they include pre-primary and secondary level (*ciclo básico*) in addition to primary education. During the first years the promoters received their salaries from Fondo Nacional para La Paz (FONAPAZ), a government agency established to assist in the peace process, as the promoters were not recognized by the Ministry of Education. Through their organization AMERG, which negotiated with the government, they were recognized by the Ministry on the condition that they finish a competence-building programme (*programa de profesionalización*), a two-year programme designed in such a way that it could be combined with their current teaching obligations. The level of education achieved through this system of promoters is outstanding in more than one way. The number of promoters is high (eighteen) compared to the neighbouring community Retalteco of almost the same size, which had only two teachers attending various classes at the time. The education promoters are local residents, and most of them are members of the cooperative or married to a member, and highly committed to their community. Lack of commitment and absence is a general problem in many other rural areas in the Petén region where the teachers often live far away, and 'arrive in the village on Tuesday and leave on Thursday'. The achievements in education in La Quetzal are widely recognized in the surrounding areas, and the school, especially the *ciclo básico*, receives children from other villages in the region. A similar process has taken place with health care, which has also been given priority.

Not only in the areas of social services has organization (and hard work) been significant. The participation in the CCPP was of crucial importance for obtaining land and for a safe start in Guatemala, as was the establishment of the cooperative Unión Maya Itzá for their economic achievements. Their organizing capacity is something the returnees (*retornados*) often emphasize when they distinguish themselves from the *repatriados* (those who returned individually) or those who had remained in the country. The individually repatriated refugees have not acquired the level of support from government and non-government agencies that the returnees have through their organizations. The same can be said about those who remained in the Guatemala. This has created envy among some of their neighbours. People in Retalteco, who stayed in Guatemala during the period of violence, describe the returnees as spoiled. They think that their neighbours have received more support from international and national institutions than they deserve. 'We are reminded of this almost every day, because donor vehicles heading for La Quetzal pass through here and never stop, said an ex-assistant mayor from Retalteco. He finds this selective support unfair because he considers that those who left were cowards, leaving the long-time suffering to those who stayed behind. At the same time, people in Retalteco recognize that they have been inspired by their new

neighbours to establish their own cooperative with the specific objective of ‘negotiating projects’, realizing that ‘nobody wants to support individual peasants’.

It is correct that the achievements of the returnees so far would not have been possible with organization alone. When they registered as refugees in Mexico they became ‘the concern of the international community’, ranging from UN organizations, international NGOs and churches. Without massive support from these organizations, their own organizations would not have gained the strength that they have today. The organizational capacity and fighting spirit that characterize the returnees have been developed and maintained through an alliance with the international community. This alliance, which is also the basis for more general international attention and sympathy, has been an invaluable resource in their relations with the Guatemalan authorities, as it gives protection against abuses and helps to obtain what they have been promised. One example of this is the negotiation with CONAP about their rights to use the forest. In comparison, internally displaced or ‘emplaced’<sup>19</sup> people have not enjoyed the same attention and support.

Moreover, the returnees have been favourite targets of assistance by NGOs and other donors. They are defined as worthy beneficiaries of aid, not only because they have suffered violence and exile, but also because they are defined as Mayan (something the returnees use strategically in spite of rejecting the Ladino/Indian dichotomy), and thus deserve privileged attention compared to poor non-Mayans who have been through similar experiences in Guatemala or abroad. This is why some of the families in La Quetzal, who for generations considered themselves as *castellanos*, now claim to be *chorti*’s, and they are quite explicit about why. Moreover, the refugees are familiar with development discourse and speak the ‘right language’. They are not passive recipients; many of them are public speakers that speak out clearly about their supposed needs and this motivates donor agencies to give support.

However, the interest of donor agencies and NGOs has not only had positive consequences for the returnees. On the one hand, the cooperative and the sectors have been offered more than they can handle. An officer working for one of the leading NGOs assisting this community complained how exhausting it was to introduce new projects in La Quetzal: ‘There is a fierce competition among the different organizations regarding how to catch the interest of the beneficiaries’. On the other hand, the cooperative members complain about the lack of adaptation to their needs as well as the lack of coordination among the different NGOs. In one case, four organizations are giving assistance to agriculture projects independently of each other. All four of them have an agenda determined by people and conditions extrinsic to the local conditions, which somehow must be adapted or made attractive to the local peasants. For example, they have offered technical assistance and training to produce new crops or other products without seriously considering the marketing potential. Peasants maintain that a major constraint is not how to produce a certain crop but rather what to produce for sale and at a fair price. What they need the most, according to some, is help in identifying crops that can be successfully produced and successfully marketed. This is needed in order to obtain more cash income.

## Conclusions

We have seen that the experience of civil war and exile that led to the dislocation of economic life and livelihood practices in the case of the Guatemalan returnees has also led them into situations where they were they taught to relate to each other and to their surroundings in new and different ways. Becoming refugees meant the incorporation into a social system where they interacted with nationals from different ethnic groups sharing a common experience of violence, flight and exile, and with foreigners from the aid and solidarity community representing practices, ideas and values that were novel to most of them. Generally, the Guatemalan refugees became well organized in spite of the precarious and poor conditions they lived in, and engaged in proactive ways to shape their conditions in the camps.

Through the participatory organization in the camps as well as through more formalized training by the aid organizations, the refugees learned new techniques of governance; not only registration and control, but also those embedded in committees, meetings, negotiations, representations, planning, projects and other practices aimed at improving their lot. They also gained a high level of political awareness that is reflected in their interaction with Mexican and Guatemalan state institutions during the years of exile, particularly during the negotiations and preparations of return. In this process the refugees learned about the existence of rights, of human rights, women's rights and citizen rights, and about the existence of national constitutions and international conventions, and they learned to claim their rights. Therefore, when they returned to Guatemala after more than a decade in exile, they did not attempt to reconstruct the patterns of the past. They embarked on the creation of a community based on democratic values, equality and participation. Even though fear of corruption and manipulation created a tendency of over-bureaucratization, these people are very proud of their new community. The returnees are open to progress, but at the same time they are also concerned about keeping traditional practices expressed mainly in family and neighbourhood relations.

The returnees in La Quetzal do not fit the image of refugees as passive, traumatized victims of war, which is the image that is commonly spread by the media as well as by aid organizations (Malkki 1997). The returnees have learned to assess new situations and opportunities and take advantage of them. This has made a return to the peasant life they had once known unattractive to most of them, and this distinguishes them from their neighbours who remained in Guatemala throughout the armed conflict, submitting to strict military control. Without denying the devastating impact that violence, flight and exile may have on the actions and self-perception of refugees in general, I argue that agency and creativity rather than passivity and resignation are more accurate characteristics in this case of Guatemalan returnees. My informants recognize that the experience of persecution and exile has inspired new notions of community and belongingness, where the sense of being a refugee and a returnee overshadow the previous notions of community based on ethnicity. This is reflected in the way they present themselves to the outside world: 'Aquí somos todos iguales, todos hemos sufrido la violencia, el refugio, todos somos retornados y pobres', (Here we are all equals, we have all suffered from violence, exile; we are all returnees and poor). This distinguishes them from the Pan-Mayan Movement that mobilizes people based on ethnic grounds.<sup>20</sup>

The returnees did not want to revert to the ways of their Mayan religious and

government traditions as in the past. They have rejected the attempts by some q'eqchi's to revitalize the traditional hierarchies of *cofradías*, as pertaining to the dark side of their history. They want to be modern in the sense of having a well-functioning cooperative, good schools and health centres, and a progressive church that is concerned with worldly as well as with the spiritual problems of their members, and at the same time, they want to participate in the economic and political life of the nation. The returnees hold a view of themselves and their community as a model for others to follow. They believe that they have gained insights that those who remained in the country do not have, and they are more than willing to share these with their neighbours in the Petén region. The relationship with their neighbours is improving and certain joint efforts are being made. However, maintaining optimism and confidence in themselves and their community will depend on short-term improvements in their income situation. Without this, people will probably start moving elsewhere in search of new opportunities. In any case, they are now much better prepared.

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## Notes

1. I spent nine months doing fieldwork in La Quetzal during 1998-2000.
2. URNG is a coalition of the three guerrilla groups EGP (Ejército Guerrillero del Pueblo), FAR (Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes) and ORPA (Organización Revolucionaria de Pueblo en Armas) and the Communist party PGT (Partido Guatemalteco de Trabajo) established in 1982.
3. Radical Catholic priests (mainly American and Spanish in Ixcán and Belgian in the Petén) started settlement projects by buying mainly state-owned land with money collected from abroad, and distributed it to poor, landless peasants who had to organize in cooperatives (Morrissey 1978; Dennis et al. 1988; Falla 1992).
4. It should be noted that this man had no previous cooperative experience. He used to live in the Ixil area of Quiché.
5. In 1981 before the refugee problem was recognized, the Mexican migration authorities tried to prevent the influx of undocumented foreigners. During that year it was common for Guatemalan refugees to be deported (Aguayo 1985, 91-4; Fagan 1983, 179; Kauffer 1997, 95). Even though my informants had heard about people being deported, none of them had been the objects of deportation themselves.

6. *Ladinos* are popularly assumed to be descendants of Spanish and Indian liaisons (*mestizos*), but in fact they are mostly Maya by biological heritage who have assimilated the national language and culture (Smith 1990).
7. According to Aguayo (1985) 68 military incursions took place between 1980 and 83, resulting in a number of kidnappings and casualties both among the refugees and the local population, in addition to material damages in the camps and beyond.
8. Another 20,000 Guatemalan refugees have returned since 1986 through the Guatemalan government's individualized repatriation process. They are called *repatriados*. Those who participated in the collective returns are called *retornados*.
9. In November 1994, MINUGUA (the United Nation Mission for the Verification of Human Rights and the Compliance of the Obligations of the Global Agreement on Human Rights in Guatemala) began its work.
10. CCPP created the *Vertiente norte* in 1993 after having evaluated the first return to Ixcán (January 1993) and concluded that future returns should be directed to three different areas of the country. *Vertiente noroccidental* and the *Vertiente sur* were responsible for organizing the returns to Ixcán and the southern coast, respectively.
11. The Maya Biosphere Reserve (MBR) comprises 1.6 million hectares covering 40 per cent of the Petén. It is divided into three zones that have varying degrees of environmental protection. Core Zone areas (784,000 hectares) are set aside for absolute protection of biodiversity. No human settlements are allowed, and only research and eco-tourism are permitted. The Multiple Use Zone consists of sparsely settled areas that surround the core zone areas. Some oil and timber industry is allowed, as is sustainable use of forest resources by local people. The Buffer Zone is a 15 km-wide band of land that separates the MBR from the southern part of the Petén, in which all kinds of industrial and agricultural practices are allowed (Beletsky 1998).
12. Most of these companions left after a few days, while only a few settled in the community for a longer period (up to one year). During the first three years after the return, international companions lived in La Quetzal, checking on the security situation of the refugees. It was believed that their presence prevented harassment by the army and others defined as potential enemies of the returnees.
13. For a more detailed account of the return process see van der Vaeren (2000). Van der Vaeren was directly involved in the process as an NGO advisor.
14. The following Mayan languages are spoken in the community: *q'eqchi'*, *q'anjob'al*, *mam*, *popti'*, *k'iché*, *chuj*, *ixil* and *ch'orti'*. The first five are spoken by larger groups of people, but the last three only by a few persons. Clothing is no longer a generalized sign of ethnic identity. Only among the *q'eqchi'*s is the use of traditional clothing still common among the women. In the other groups only the older women wear a *corte* (a cloth used as skirt), and those who still have their *huipil* (traditional woven blouse) use them on special occasions. Younger women and girls are westernized in their way of dressing, as are the men of all groups and ages.
15. This does not mean that all the board members are in office only for one year. They are expected to stay for two years. Withdrawal after one year has to be approved by the general assembly and requires a good reason to be accepted.
16. *Xate* is a wild plant gathered in the jungle. Florists use it to accompany flowers when making bouquets. It has the special attribute that after having been cut, it stays fresh for two to three weeks without water.
17. For a comprehensive historical analysis of population development in the Petén, see Schwartz 1990.
18. Centro Maya is attempting to take the lead in the development of ecologically sound food production systems and other economic alternatives for use outside the protected zones in the Petén. Established in 1991, Centro Maya includes the Rodale Institute, the Tropical Agricultural Research and Training Centre (CATIE), the University of San Carlos, and the Institute of Agricultural Science and Technology (ICTA). The goal of Centro Maya is to increase food production in the Petén while preserving the tropical forest.
19. The terms emplacement/emplaced people are used in the literature about those who, in contrast to displacement or displaced people, are 'locked up' or prevented from leaving an area hit by violence.
20. The Pan-Mayan movement is a new post-conflict phenomenon, even though Mayan activists have been making themselves heard ever since the 1970s. Educated Mayans have worked to create a so-

cial movement focused on the cultural revitalization and unification of the indigenous in opposition to the *ladino*. The Maya movement is not a unified one and the priorities are diverse and sometimes contradictory. For information about the Pan-Mayan Movement see Fisher and McKenna Brown 1996, Warren 1998, and Warren and Jackson 2002, Wilson 1995.

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